

MODULE TITLE: Cultural Context of Architecture III  
MODULE CODE: ARC301B1  
HAND OUT No: 9

Essential Reading:

Scott G, The Architecture of Humanism, New York London, W W Norton, 1999/1974

Watkin D, Morality and Architecture Revisited, London, John Murray, 2001

### Vocation and Knowledge

The excitement or jouissance felt about 'doing' architecture is often argued to be most appropriate when it is entirely dedicated to 'becoming an architect' or to 'solving the problems that an architect promises to solve when granted the use of the title "architect" by society. The implication is that the determined architect is something of a loose cannon whilst the knowledge based individual is the agent of society, the naïve enquirer in a world in which happily his/her discoveries are of some material benefit to mankind.

Vocation - a particular occupation, business, or profession; calling, the latter part being partly worrying for reasons given below as to mystical origins, but not otherwise since both the dilettante and the vocational architect can be obtuse and hysterical just as much as each other.

The differences between the two kinds of doing and being are frequently referred to as 'vocational' and 'knowledge' based approaches. Obviously both refer to knowledge but it is a question of what knowledge might be when it is at home. Thus to the vocational architect knowledge may be sufficient when it is about building a building whereas to the person trained to 'think like an architect' it may be sufficient only when it is about not only building but also about social need, occupancy and use, economic situations and so on. However it is not the case that such a neat division exists since the vocational architect may just as well believe architecture to be a social art or a worldly science, as not.

As with most terms the use of the term will be partly coincidental, used because it exists, whilst it may also be used because it has a meaning common to a certain group and to a certain culture. This involves several proofs or relationships that lie outside of building as such and link to social and historical relationships. In particular the proof of a truth based on language alone would require a strong belief in linguistic meaning that has very little to do with building. Convenience of use would require only the proof that the word functions with a necessary group of people or framework of reason. In most cases any actual differences between a vocational and knowledge based architect is unimportant because either one is perfectly as able to act as if they are the other, it depends upon the work required to be done. Taking the argument to an extreme would be nihilistic.

### **Accomplished Nihilism**

Nihilism is the requirement that every statement/text must be proven and/or true. Nothing can be taken as a fact unless it is proven to be a true fact. The problem with this is that in order to prove anything we need to causally link every phenomenon to all others and this is not only impossible it is also unlikely since phenomena themselves appear and disappear in a "transmitted field". The transmitted field is the place in which body and world together produce phenomena and in which we appear as interpreters; which means that we select for importance and articulation of phenomena. An accomplished nihilism is not a 'halfway stage' but a skill at finding out when causally linked phenomena cease to be worth bothering about. We stop chasing around the transmitted field and remain content with what we have managed to find. If truth is not worth bothering about then it is easy to claim that the entire world lacks any foundational truth. Thus meaning appears to be what matters and to whom and when thus introducing social and historical aspects to the idea of truth so that a temporal and distinctly human

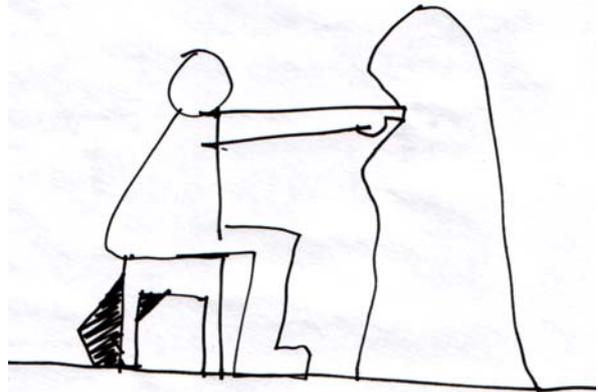
boundary is drawn around meaning and the truth of meaning for which read effort to find meaning in other words to relate further phenomena to existing phenomena is the search for cause. Thus one of the largest differences between vocational and knowledge based approaches falls away since in both cases knowledge may be epicentric around the individual or a building project or to humanity as a whole. In fact it is the link to work that makes the kind of knowledge more or less likely to matter because work tends to have an economic moment that sustains itself rather than to look for any longer term benefits in the form of a political economic projection. Thus vocational may be seen as work whilst the knowledge based architect may be seen as both work and also as a political economic projection in excess of the moment of economy that produces work.

In our particular question about vocational and knowledge based architecture we can understand an underlying question. This is a question about the person acting as an architect doing so as an artist or scientist (looking at expression or exploration of body and/or world) or as it were alternatively for the excess above work. It is also a question about whether an architect is born to be 'one' or trained to be 'one'. The belief in the first is quite linked the concept of the world producing such things as building which it does by a combination of specific actions both social and historic in which people play a part. It is also to some degree a question about whether a person has the right to do what they want or to

become something that society wants. In most cases people lose their excitement about a subject if it becomes overly problematic in a way that they do not think suitable. This can lead to the opposite effect, that of framing an identity within a causal fabric that becomes metaphysical at its edges. This is to say that rather than find causal relationships based on history and society and the things people and the world produce the relationships are linked to data that nobody can sense either now or perhaps ever. Thus a person might say they were 'born to be an architect' or that they are a 'genius' and actually mean that they are intrinsically good at architecture because of some link that no one can determine but that seems demanding of explanation but they really can't be bothered so long as the phrase 'born to be' allows them to get on with what they like doing or what provides them with a decent living. The fairy tale of the Emperor's clothes seems appropriate here

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Emperor's\\_New\\_Clothes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Emperor's_New_Clothes)

So statements about genius, when not socially limited to bars and 'really good friends' are usually wrong however they are quite common and are often used when what people really mean is that someone is quite good at something or earns a living from it but no one has managed to work out how it happened to come about. The problem with perpetuating the myth that people are born to 'be' clever is that people then make peculiar decisions about parenting.



EXPRESSION  
& EXPLORATION.  
BODY + WORLD